Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Vayishlach

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Torah Wellsprings - Toldos

Vayishlach

Falling Seven Times, Rising Again

I t states (Mishlei 24:16) כִּי שֶׁבַע יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וָקָם, "a tzaddik may fall seven times, and arise." The pasuk doesn't begin with the word "tzaddik", but rather with falling seven times. Reb Don Segal Shlita says that this tells us that until one falls from his level, again and again, he isn't a tzaddik yet.[1]

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 59a) says אוקירו לנשייכו כי היכי דתיעתרי, "Honor your wives, so you will become wealthy." לנשייכו can also be translated as forgotten (see Bereishis 41:51). Degel Machaneh Efraim (Vayechi) explains these words to mean, אוקירו לנשייכו, a person must honor and consider the times of "forgetting" to be important days. When one falls from his *madreigos* and sometimes forgets Hashem and the mitzvos, etc., those days are also days of significance, since he will reach much higher levels when he improves his ways. This is the meaning of אוקירו לנשייכו כי היכי דתיעתרי, "Honor the days of 'forgetting' because they will result in wealth and success in avodas Hashem.[2]

It states (32:25-26) וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר, וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ, "Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip, so Yakov's hip was dislocated as he wrestled with him." (32:32) וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ, "The sun rose for him as he passed Penuel and was limping on his hip."

It is known that this "איש" who wrestled with Yaakov Avinu was a *malach*, the *Sar* of Eisav, and is also known as the yetzer hara. The holy sefarim explain that their battle represents the battle that the Yidden have with the yetzer hara. The Avodas Yissachar notes that the battle began when Yaakov was left alone, as it states וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ, and it was a time when Yaakov felt that he was at a lower level (as he explains there). The malach (the yetzer hara) thought that this was a good time to cause Yaakov to fall into *yeush*. Therefore, he was וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ, "he struck the

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1. The Be'er Mayim Chaim zt"l notes that when a person wants to throw something a great distance, he first lowers his arm. That downward motion creates the momentum needed to propel the object farther. Similarly, a spiritual fall can become the catalyst for an even greater ascent. The descent itself generates the momentum for future growth.

According to the Be'er Mayim Chaim, even the fall can be viewed as part of the growth process, because it leads a person to levels of greatness that otherwise could not have been attained. This idea is reflected in the pasuk, כִּי שֶׁבַע יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וָקָם. On a simple level, the pasuk appears to describe two distinct phases in the life of a tzaddik: periods of נפילה, when he falls from his spiritual level, and periods of וָקָם, when he rises again. The Be'er Mayim Chaim offers a deeper interpretation. He explains that the pasuk is describing a single process. The words שֶׁבַע יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וָקָם teach that even the seven falls themselves are part of the rising. The descent is not merely followed by growth; it is an integral component of that growth. Through those falls, the tzaddik reaches spiritual heights that would otherwise have remained beyond his grasp.

2. When marking a test, a teacher places a check mark, ✓, beside a correct answer. The check mark is a little like the letter V: it goes down and then rises again. Perhaps that is why it serves as such a fitting symbol of success. It reminds us that achievement is not a straight path upward. Often, we stumble, make mistakes, or face setbacks. True success comes from having the courage to rise after we fall and continue moving forward.

socket of his hip". He tried to give Yaakov the feeling that he couldn't walk anymore, which means that he couldn't grow in avodas Hashem and reach higher levels.

But Yaakov strengthened himself and continued to walk, as it states: וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ. He didn't lose hope and continued to serve Hashem, and Hashem saved him from Eisav. This is the meaning of the pasuk וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ. Hashem shone the sun for him and saved him from Eisav. The reason is וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ: Yaakov kept walking forward to reach higher levels. He didn't allow himself to fall into despair due to his spiritual letdowns. With strength, he continued walking, and thereby, he won the battle against the Sar of Eisav, and he won the battle against Eisav and his four hundred people.

The Sar of Eisav (the yetzer hara) said to Yaakov (32:29, see Rashi) לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעִם אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל, "No longer will it be said your name is Yaakov, only Yisrael… because you have overcome." Rashi explains this to mean that Yaakov overcame the tests and challenges with Lavan and Eisav.

Why is this called ותוכל, success? Did Yaakov succeed with Lavan and Eisav? Lavan cheated him one hundred times, and he was limping after his battle with Eisav. Why is this called ותוכל, that he overcame them? The answer is that Yaakov continued serving Hashem, even after he was cheated and wounded. He didn't lose hope when the malach and Lavan gave him a hard time. He didn't lose hope, and this is why the Torah writes ותוכל.

It states (33:4) וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד אָחִיו, וַיָּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוָּארָו וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ, "[Yaakov] bowed down earthward seven times until he reached his brother, then they wept." The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 78:8) says that he bowed seven times because of the concept of כִּי שֶׁבַע יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וָקָם. Yaakov was teaching Bnei Yisrael that even if they fall multiple times, they can still strengthen themselves and start anew, as if nothing happened.

Furthermore, it is written in sefarim that falling is a part of getting up. If one doesn't lose hope and strengthens himself to start again, his fall will be a conduit for him to rise to an even higher level. We see this in Gemara (Gittin 43a), אין אדם עומד על דברי תורה אלא אם כן נכשל בה, which means the path to acquiring Torah (and all aspects of avodas Hashem) is specifically from those times when one errs and transgresses the Torah, chalilah.

It states (32:23) וַיָּקָם בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֵת מַעֲבַר יַבֹּק, "[Yaakov] arose during that night, and he took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of *Yabok*." Rashi writes, where was Dinah? He locked her in a box, so Eisav shouldn't put his eyes on her. Yaakov was punished for doing so, and Dinah fell into the hands of Shechem. He was punished because he prevented Eisav from marrying her. Perhaps Dinah could have made Eisav into a baal teshuvah.

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt'l proves from this that a person should never say that he is too old to do teshuvah. Eisav was ninety-nine years old[3] and a great *rasha*, but Hashem was still hoping for him to do teshuvah. Today, we see young bachurim, holy bachurim, who only want to do good, and they have lost hope in themselves. They think teshuvah won't help them. Let us

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3. We know Eisav's age because Yaakov and Eisav were twins, and Yaakov was ninety-nine years old at this time. Yaakov left his father's home at the age of sixty-three, studied in the yeshivah of Shem and Ever for fourteen years, and then worked for Lavan for twenty years. In addition, some time elapsed between Yaakov's departure from Lavan's home and his encounter with Eisav. Therefore, Eisav would have been ninety-nine years old as well.

know that Hashem desires our teshuvah, and there is hope for everyone.

The Primary Battle is on the Boundaries

It states (32:25) וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר, "a man wrestled with [Yaakov] until the break of dawn." As we explained, this "man" was a malach, the Sar of Eisav, also known as the yetzer hara. The *gemara* (Chulin 91a) states that Yaakov thought that this person was a goy (כעובד כוכבים נדמה לו). Another opinion in the gemara is כתלמיד חכם נדמו לו, Yaakov thought he was a talmid chacham.

If the person was a goy, we can understand the nature of the battle. But if he was a talmid chacham, why did he come to battle with Yaakov, and what was the battle about? The meforshim explain this in various ways.

We can explain that this "man" came to Yaakov, appearing like a talmid chacham, and told Yaakov Avinu that making boundaries and safeguards to protect himself from aveiros is extreme and unnecessary, and that boundaries cause more harm than good. Yaakov disagreed. He knew that only with these boundaries and safeguards can a person succeed in serving Hashem. When the boundaries are removed, he is just a small step away from performing aveiros, r'l, sometimes severe ones. Yaakov battled with "talmid chacham" because boundaries are essential and cannot be ignored.

Some add that the two explanations of the Gemara are one and the same. He first appeared like a talmid chacham and then like a goy. The yetzer hara comes to every Yid to battle with him (not only to Yaakov). Initially, the yetzer hara doesn't come to a person to convince him to perform aveiros because the yetzer hara knows that a Yid won't listen to him. Instead, the yetzer hara says, "You don't have to be so *machmir*. It is sufficient to keep the *halachah*, without adding boundaries and safeguards." He pretends to be a talmid chacham, and claims that he is telling you what the Torah says. When one listens to the yetzer hara and abandons the *gedarim* (boundaries), he will end up transgressing aveiros and will fall to low levels.

This brings us to the opinion that the yetzer hara came in the form of a goy. After causing him to transgress the boundaries of the Torah, he goes to the next level and tries to test and challenge his Yiddishkeit.

The Maharam Shik zt'l says a similar pshat, but in the opposite order. He says that the yetzer hara comes to a person to entice him to commit grave sins. When he sees that he doesn't succeed, he lowers his aim and tries to convince the Yid to perform a "minor" aveirah. As it states (pasuk 26) וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ, "When [the Sar of Eisav] perceived that he could not overcome [Yaakov], he struck the socket of his hip, and Yaakov's hip was dislocated as he wrestled with him." This means that when the yetzer hara sees that he can't cause a Yid to sin, he touches him. He encourages him to perform a "small" aveirah. For he knows that one aveirah leads to the next one, and he is now at risk of falling to very low levels.

Yaakov davened for his family's safety before meeting with Eisav. He said that Hashem promised that He will take care of him and of his family, and He will make them into a large nation, like the sand near the sea. Yaakov said (32:13) וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת זַרְעֲךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב, "You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed as numerous as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of multitude.'"

The brachah to be numerous like sand was said to Avraham Avinu after the Akeidah, as it states (22:17) כִּי בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ וְהַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם, " I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore…"

In this brachah, Hashem gave two metaphors: many like the stars in heaven and like the sand at the seashore. In Yaakov's

tefillah, he only mentioned the brachah to be numerous like sand. Why didn't he say that Hashem said that they will be numerous like the stars?

This question is asked by the *meforshim* (see Agra d'Kalah and He'emak Davar from the Netziv). Sand is unique as it prevents the sea from flooding the world. Similarly, the Jewish nation makes *gedarim,* boundaries, which protect them from becoming influenced by the goyim that surround them and want to flood them with their ways. Hakadosh Baruch Hu's *brachah* is that Yaakov's children be like the sand at the seashore, always making good boundaries that will protect them and preserve their uniqueness, holiness, and Yiddishkeit. In his tefillah, Yaakov specifically mentioned the brachah that they be numerous like the sand, to mention the merit of the Jewish nation that they make boundaries. He prayed that in this merit, Hashem should protect them.

Yaakov said to Lavan (Bereishis 31:38-40) זֶה עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ ... בַּיּוֹם אֲכָלַנִי חֹרֶב וְקֶרַח בַּלָּיְלָה וַתִּדַּד שְׁנָתִי מֵעֵינָי, "Already twenty years have I been with you… I was in the field by day when the heat consumed me, and the frost at night, and my sleep wandered from my eyes." The question is: why did Yaakov sleep outside? Didn't Lavan have room in his home for Yaakov to sleep? Didn't Lavan have warm blankets and good pillows to give him? The Chemdah Genuzah writes that he heard from the Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l that for the twenty years that Yaakov was working for Lavan, he didn't once enter Lavan's home. At night, he slept outdoors to protect himself from Lavan's influence.

It states (33:18) וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שְׁכֶם... וַיִּחַן אֶת פְּנֵי הָעִיר, "Yaakov came safely to the city Shechem… and he encamped before the city." The Netziv explains that Yaakov was cautious to encamp אֶת פְּנֵי הָעִיר before the city. He didn't want to sleep in Shechem, as a safeguard from being influenced by them.

The first step for kedushah and taharah is when a person tells himself, "I am holy, and therefore, I don't want to be among people who don't have *yiras Shamayim*. I don't want to become *tamei* with those who are צרוע וזב (alluding to people who lack fear of heaven). Also, I don't want to go to places where the guidelines of kedushah aren't upheld."[4]

It states (32:25) וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ, a man wrestled with Yaakov. Rashi writes, מנחם פירש ויתעפר איש, מלשון אבק, שהיו מעלים עפר ברגליהם על ידי נענועם, "[The commentary] Menachem explains: 'And a man became covered with dust', derived from אָבָק, dust, for they were raising dust with their feet through their movements." This commentary explains that וַיֵּאָבֵק means they raised dust while they wrestled. There are slight aveiros that are called אבק, dust. For example, there is אבק לשון הרע and אבק ריבית and אבקה של שביעית, etc. It isn't the aveirah itself, but it is like the dust of the aveirah, the outer layer of the aveiros. These represent the boundaries around the mitzvos. The Torah calls Yaakov's battle with the yetzer hara ויאבק to indicate that the primary battle was with the boundaries and safeguards,

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4. The Chofetz Chaim zt"l would travel from city to city selling his sefarim. In those days, people living in communities far from Radin had often never heard of the Chofetz Chaim and did not realize the greatness of the distinguished guest in their midst. As a result, he was not always provided with the finest accommodations.

On one occasion, a man invited him to join his family for the Shabbos meals. The Chofetz Chaim responded by asking who else would be attending. The host was taken aback by the question and thought to himself, "You should be grateful that I invited you. Why are you concerned about who else will be there?"

The Chofetz Chaim then explained, "My name is Yisrael Meir of Radin. I am the author of the Mishnah Berurah and other sefarim. I am careful to eat only in the company of people who are upright and G-d-fearing. That is why I asked who else would be at the meal."

and not the aveiros themselves. The yetzer hara knows that he can't convince a Yid to transgress severe aveiros, so the yetzer hara tries to cause a Yid to sin with the "dust" of the aveiros, the safeguards. When one puts up a strong battle at these places, he will win.

Yaakov sent a message to Eisav, and one of the things he said was עם לבן הרשע (Rashi 32:5) גרתי, ותרי"ג מצות שמרתי, ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים, "I lived with Lavan, the rasha, and I guarded the 613 mitzvos, and I didn't learn from his bad ways". Why didn't Yaakov use the expression תרי"ג מצות קיימתי, "I *kept* the 613 mitzvos"? Why did he say שמרתי, that he *guarded* the mitzvos? The Shevet Mishor zt'l answers that שמרתי represents the *gedarim*, boundaries, משמרת וגדר. Eisav figured that Yaakov couldn't be a tzaddik anymore. He had lived twenty years with Lavan, the *rasha*, and he was among all Lavan's evil friends. Eisav figured that he was influenced by their bad ways. Yaakov told him, שמרתי, that he made safeguards, and with them he kept all 613 mitzvos and didn't learn from Lavan's ways.

We quote the Shevet Mishor: "Yaakov Avinu was concerned that Eisav wouldn't believe that he kept the 613 mitzvos. He will say, 'How can a person live in the house of a Lavan, the *rasha*, without learning from his bad ways?' So, Yaakov hinted to him that he made *gedarim* before each mitzvah, so that if the yetzer hara convinces him to transgress, he only transgresses the safeguard, and not the aveirah itself. This is the meaning of תרי"ג מצות שמרתי. I made safeguards, which are called משמרת, as it states ושמרתם משמרתי, and Chazal (Yevamos 21) say that this means to make boundaries and gates to protect the mitzvos (משמרת למשמרתי). In this manner, I didn't learn from his bad ways."

Describing the Yetzer Hara

The gemara (Succah 52a) discusses the yetzer hara and says, צדיקים נדמה להם כהר, ורשעים נדמה להם כחוט השערה, "To tzaddikim, the yetzer hara appears like a mountain, and to resha'im, it appears like a hair." What is the truth? Is the yetzer hara like a mountain or like a hair? Who sees it correctly? The Pnei Menachem zt'l says that the key word here is נדמה, from the word דמיון, imagination. The resha'im say that the yetzer hara is a hair, nothing serious, nothing to be afraid of, nothing to be concerned about. They don't consider aveiros to be so bad, so they are not afraid of the temptations that it brings.

The tzaddikim imagine the yetzer hara as a mountain. This is because, for tzaddikim, aveiros are grave and severe, and they are careful to avoid them.

Some explain the Gemara as follows: The resha'im have already listened to the yetzer hara, and know that the yetzer hara doesn't really have anything to sell. The temptations are nothing at all; they are small, like a hair. But the tzaddikim have never succumbed to the yetzer hara, so they think that it's offering something large and significant. Therefore, tzaddikim see the yetzer hara as a large mountain.[5]

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5. The Alter of Novardok zt"l offered the following mashal:

A poor man was walking down the road on Shabbos when he spotted a large sum of money lying on the ground. Immediately, a problem arose: money is muktzeh. How could he take it?

His desire for the money was so strong that he began searching for reasons to be lenient. First, he reasoned that because he was desperately poor, he might soon be unable to provide food for himself and his family. Perhaps this was a matter of pikuach nefesh, saving lives, for which one may even desecrate Shabbos.

Then he thought of another possibility. Maybe he could pick up the money with the backs of his hands, thereby changing the normal manner of carrying it. Perhaps that would be permissible. He came up with yet another idea: he could use the money to dry his hands. There are situations in which muktzeh may be

The malach wounded Yaakov Avinu around dawn, at עלות השחר, as it states (32:25) וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר... וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ, "a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn… He touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Yaakov's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him."

Yaakov was healed when the sun rose above the horizon, at נץ החמה, as it states (32:32): וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, the sun shone for him, to heal him (see Rashi).

Yaakov was wounded by dawn (*alos hashachar*) and was healed by sunrise (*netz hachamah*).

עלות השחר (daybreak/dawn) is the beginning of the morning, when the first rays of the sun shine on the horizon, when it is still dark outside, and appears very much like nighttime. Seventy-two minutes later is נץ החמה, sunrise, when the sun rises above the horizon. This hints to us that the primary battle with the yetzer hara is metaphorically between dawn and sunrise, in other words, when things are dark and uncertain. When a person knows clearly what a mitzvah is and what an aveirah is, the yetzer hara doesn't have too much strength over him. But when matters aren't 100% clear and certain, and he doesn't know if it is allowed or forbidden, then the yetzer hara can entice the person.[6]

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moved l'tzorech gufo, when one needs the item itself for a permitted purpose. Although this halachah does not apply to money, he nevertheless considered it another possible justification.

Suddenly, someone whispered in his ear, “The money is counterfeit.”

At once, all his interest in the money vanished. Just moments earlier, he had been passionately searching for a way to bring the money home. Now he could not care less about it. In that instant, he realized that all of his sevaros, all of the arguments and justifications he had devised, were completely unfounded. They had not emerged from a sincere search for the truth, but from his desire to possess the money.

The same is true of every taavah that enters a person's heart. A taavah is far easier to overcome when one recognizes that it is merely a dimyon, an illusion. When a person sees clearly that the object of his desire has no real value and will bring him no genuine benefit, the temptation loses its power. With that clarity, he can overcome the yetzer hara and remain faithful to what is right.

6. After the Holocaust, the tzaddik Reb Mordechai Pogramansky zt"l lived in France and devoted tremendous effort to helping orphaned survivors marry one another and build faithful Jewish homes.

At one chasunah, some of the guests wanted to add a bit of joy and laughter to an occasion attended by people whose lives had been shattered by the war. They prepared a humorous prank by bringing in a very large, beautifully wrapped gift. Everyone cheered, assuming that it must contain something valuable and expensive. When the outer wrapping was removed, however, there was another box inside, and then another, and another. Finally, after all the layers had been opened, the actual gift was revealed. It was very small.

The guests laughed and cheered. The prank had succeeded in bringing a moment of happiness to those who had endured so much suffering.

But while everyone else was smiling, Reb Mordechai wept bitterly.

No one understood why he was crying. Later, he explained what had been on his mind.

He said that he was thinking about what happens to a person after 120 years, when he leaves this world and goes up to Heaven. It is not only the neshamah that goes before the Heavenly Court. In a certain sense, a person's entire life accompanies him. His childhood, his youth, his years of marriage and parenthood, his work, his accomplishments, and the way he spent his days all come with him. In Heaven, each package is opened to see what it contains and what value it possesses Above.

After Yaakov's children took the spoils from the war against Shechem, Yaakov told them (35:2) הָסִרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם וְהִטַּהֲרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שִׂמְלֹתֵיכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are in your midst; cleanse yourselves and change your clothes." Rashi explains that he meant that they should discard the avodah zarah items and avodah zarah clothes that they took from the spoils of war.

The Kli Yakar teaches another lesson in Yaakov's words. He was telling them to discard the yetzer hara that was within their hearts. This is alluded to in Yaakov's words, הָסִרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are *in your midst*." This refers to the yetzer hara, which is בְּתֹכְכֶם, within your hearts. As it states in Tehillim (81:10) לֹא יִהְיֶה בְךָ אֵ-ל זָר, "There shall be no foreign god within you," and Chazal (Shabbos 105b) say, "What is the אֵ-ל זָר within man? This is the yetzer hara!" The Kli Yakar explains that הָסִרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are in your midst," means to cleanse one's thoughts, to be clean and pure, and not stemming from the yetzer hara.[7]

Sometimes, package after package is opened, only to reveal emptiness. So much of life may have been occupied with trivialities and distractions. There are no mitzvos inside, no lasting achievements, only empty containers. Then, at last, a small package is opened, and inside are a few precious mitzvos and good deeds. Compared to all the years that passed, only a small amount remains.

There is another lesson in this story.

Everyone enjoyed the prank except for two people: the chasan and kallah. When they first saw the enormous gift, they naturally assumed that it contained something large and valuable. In the end, however, they discovered that it was only a small present. Had they known beforehand that it was all a joke, they would not have been disappointed. From the very beginning, they would have understood that the large package was merely wrapping and nothing more.

The same is true regarding temptation. Every test that the yetzer hara presents appears like a large and impressive package. A person imagines that there is real pleasure and fulfillment waiting inside. But often there is nothing there at all. It is merely a dimyon, an illusion, wrapped in layer upon layer of attractive packaging. When a person recognizes this from the outset, he is far better equipped to overcome the test.

There is yet a third lesson to be learned.

The tzaddikim teach that in our spiritually impoverished generations, every good deed is exceedingly precious to Hashem. We live in a world filled with confusion and darkness, where serving Hashem can be especially difficult. As a result, even seemingly small acts of mitzvah carry tremendous value in Heaven.

In the story, the gift hidden inside the many boxes was small, yet when it was finally revealed, everyone rejoiced and celebrated it. The gift was cherished despite its size.

So too, every mitzvah we perform, every act of kindness, every moment of Torah and tefillah, however small it may seem in our eyes, is treasured by Hashem. In a world where goodness is often difficult to achieve, even the smallest sincere deed is precious and worthy of great rejoicing.

7. On a yahrtzeit, there is a custom to study chapters of Mishnayos whose opening letters spell the name of the niftar. For example, if the niftar's name was שלום, one could learn Berachos chapter 7, which begins with the letter ש (שלשה שאכלו), followed by Maaser Sheini chapter 2, which begins with a ל (לא יאמר), then Demai chapter 2, which begins with a ו (ואלו דברים), and finally Berachos chapter 1, which begins with a מ (מאימתי קורין).

The Beis Avraham zt"l noted that very few chapters of Mishnayos begin with the letter צ. In fact, the two well-known examples are found in Seder Taharos, Maseches Parah, chapters 9 and 12. He explained that this contains a profound lesson. The letter צ alludes to a tzaddik. The fact that the Mishnayos beginning with צ are found specifically in Taharos teaches that one who wishes to become a tzaddik must devote himself to taharah, spiritual purity. He must constantly strive to purify his thoughts, speech, and actions, guarding himself from impurity and elevating every aspect of his conduct. Through this constant striving for purity, a person can merit becoming a true tzaddik.

After telling them to cleanse their minds, Yaakov told them to cleanse their deeds from all aveiros. This is the meaning of וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שִׂמְלֹתֵיכֶם, "Change your clothes," which means to have good deeds and no aveiros. This alludes to (Koheles 9:8) בְּכָל עֵת יִהְיוּ בְגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים, "Let your garments always be white". This prepared them to come before Hashem.

The Gemara says that the yetzer hara, at the beginning, is compared to the strands of a spider web. To explain this comparison, we quote a line from the Baal HaTanya (Igeres HaTeshuvah). He writes, "It can be compared to a person who places something in the window to block the sunlight. Something thin and light will block the sun just as well as something thick and bulky." However, when it is thin and light, it is easier to remove. The yetzer hara is compared to a spider web, which can easily be removed. When a spider spins a web in front of a window, someone inside the room might cry that it is so dark, but the darkness can easily be removed. The same is with the yetzer hara. It is just imagination. If a person desires, he can rip it like a spider web, and light and joy can shine into his life again.

Chesed

It states (33:17) וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת עַל כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת, "Yaakov traveled to Succos and built himself a house, and for his cattle he made succos; therefore, he named the place Succos." Surprisingly, the place was named after animals' homes. Isn't it more appropriate to name a place after people, and not after animals? Why is the place called succos because of the huts he made for animals? It should be called בָּיִת, house, for the home he made for humans.

Tzaddikim (Shevet HaLevi עה"ת ד"ה קטנתי, ועוד) explain that the good, kind deeds that one does for others are the most important. The animals allude to people who are selfish and only think about themselves, like animals who are only concerned with their own portion of food. Even for them, it is very precious when we are kind to them.

It states (32:33) עַל כֵּן לֹא יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה, "Therefore, Bnei Yisrael may not eat the גיד הנשה, which is on the socket of the hip, until this day, for he touched the socket of Yaakov's hip, in the hip sinew." The Chizkuni says that the reason for this mitzvah is to remind us that we must take care of others. He writes, "This mitzvah was commanded to Bnei Yisrael so they will remember what happened to Yaakov Avinu when he was left alone, when he went over the river to get the small jugs. His sons didn't come along with him, and this resulted in Yaakov returning with a limp. Let every person learn from this to be kind and to help people, each person with what they need, be it ruchniyus or gashmiyus."

It states (32:4) וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֵשָׂו אָחִיו, "Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to his brother Eisav…" Rashi writes that they were literally angels (מַלְאָכִים מַמָּשׁ). Why did Yaakov choose to send malachim, and not his servants, human beings? Why disturb the malachim from their service in Heaven? Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pshischa zt'l answers that this is to tell us the greatness of doing a favor for a Yid. Even for malachim, it is worthwhile to stop their avodah in Heaven to do a favor for a Yid.

As the Ahavas Shalom zt'l said about himself (and it is written in Ahavas Shalom, Kedoshim, בהג"ה) that when he studies Torah and is immersed in spiritual thoughts, if at that time he sees a Yid, even a very simple Yid, who is in distress, and wants to speak to him for about half an hour to get some chizuk, I will leave my Torah and all the greatness I had, just to do the good deed of performing kindness for a Yid."

The Baal Shem Tov zt'l said that it is worth it for a person to live in this world seventy or eighty years, just to do one favor for a Yid[8] (לוח היום יום חב"ד ה' אייר).

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8. It states (32:13), וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ. There is a wonderful remez in these words, taught by the Divrei

One should seek to say kind words to his fellow man. The Torah talks about the kind words the midwife said to Rachel when she was suffering a difficult labor while giving birth to Binyamin. It states וַיְהִי בְּהַקְשֹׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמְיַלֶּדֶת אַל תִּירְאִי כִּי גַם זֶה לָךְ בֵּן, "It was when she had difficulty in her labor that the midwife said to her "Have no fear, for this one, too, is a son for you." Why is this pasuk written in the Torah? Why do we have to know what the midwife said? It is teaching us that, in Hashem's eyes, it is precious and a great merit when one gives encouragement to his fellow man and helps him overcome his fears and worries.

Yisrael of Modzhitz zt"l.

Chazal say that one should declare, כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד, "Everything Hashem does is for the good." The sefarim explain that when a person says that it is good, it will become good. This is the meaning of וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ. The pasuk is telling Yidden: וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ - you shall say; הֵיטֵב - that it is good; and then אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ - I will do good with you.

The renowned chasid Reb Leibel Kutner zt"l, who lived through the Holocaust, would often repeat the following thought:

Of all the Avos, Yaakov Avinu endured the most hardship. He suffered from Lavan, from Eisav, from Dinah's kidnapping, and then from the loss of Yosef. Yet regarding Yaakov it states, וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ, "You said, 'I will surely do good with you.'" We see from this that we do not always know what true goodness is. Indeed, despite all the tzaros Yaakov endured, he merited to establish the twelve shevatim.

Someone traveled to Budapest, Hungary, in order to daven at the kever of Rebbe Shayele Kerestirer zt"l. He planned to take the daily minibus to Kerestir. However, he was only going to be in Hungary for two days, and on both of those days the shuttle to Kerestir was canceled. He did not have enough money to hire a taxi, and he was very broken. The entire purpose of his trip was to be in Kerestir, and now he had no way of getting there.

While dwelling on these bitter thoughts, he realized that he had not eaten for quite some time. There were two places nearby where he could get food. One was a restaurant called Chana's, and the other was Carmel.

He went to Carmel. The restaurant was crowded, and one of the employees asked him, "Are you here alone or with a group?"

"I'm alone," he replied.

"Then I'm sorry, but you can't stay here. Today we are serving groups only. As you can see, there are no tables available for individuals."

He was very upset. He was hungry, and now they would not serve him any food. He left the restaurant and went instead to Chanele's.

There was a Yid sitting there by himself. After a few minutes, the man turned to him and said, "Shalom Aleichem! Tell me, do you know anyone who wants to go to Kerestir? I have a car and want to drive there, but I'm afraid that if I travel alone, I may fall asleep. I'm looking for someone who would be willing to come along with me."

The traveler replied that Kerestir was exactly where he wanted to go.

The man drove him to Kerestir, rented a hotel room for him for the night, and the next morning drove him back to Budapest. Before his flight, he even took him to the airport.

He then realized that the "bad person" in the other restaurant, who had refused to serve him, had actually done him a tremendous favor. Because of him, he had gone to Chana's, where he met the Yid who took him to Kerestir.

It is likely that this time, the מילדת, midwife didn't accomplish anything with her encouraging words. Rachel certainly knew that she was giving birth to a son, since that was what she was praying for. Her tefillos were (30:24) יֹסֵף ה' לִי בֵּן אַחֵר, that she should bear a son. Furthermore, the *Imahos* were *nevios*, so she certainly knew that she was giving birth to a son. Nevertheless, the מילדת's kind words are written in the Torah, and we read them every year. About this, we can say the adage of Chazal, "There is a person who acquires Olam HaBa in a moment." With one kind word, see how much she earned!

It states in parashas Vayeitzei (29:10) וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב וַיְגַל אֶת הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיַּשְׁקְ אֶת צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ, "Yaakov came forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and he watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother." The Torah (29:8, and Rashi) tells that all the shepherds had to gather and push the stone off the well together. It was a very heavy stone. But Yaakov easily took off the stone from the well. Rashi writes that he took off the large stone like someone removing a cork from a bottle. "This is to tell us that he was very strong."

In Tefilas Geshem, we pray that Hashem give us rain in Yaakov Avinu's merit. We say, יחד לב וגל אבן מפי באר מים, בעבורו אל תמנע מים, "He united his heart, and he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well. In his merit, don't refrain from us water." Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar Maamar 51) asks: since it was easy for Yaakov Avinu to remove the stone from the well, why is this merit discussed as a reason that Hashem should give us rain?

He answers that the stone was huge and heavy, even for Yaakov Avinu. But he יחד לב, united his heart. He concentrated his heart on the mission of helping his fellow man. His deepest wish, burning in his heart, was to help others. That gave him strength, and he was able to lift the stone easily. We are asking for rain in the merit of Yaakov Avinu's יחד לב, deep desire to help others.[9]

Hishtadlus

The Baal HaTurim in this week's parashah (32:17) writes that the word רֶוַח, space, is written twice in Tanach. One is in this week's parashah, when Yaakov sent a gift to Eisav. He sent camels, goats, sheep, cows, donkeys, and it states וְרֶוַח תָּשִׂימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר, "Make a space between one herd and another herd." Rashi explains that the space was to make an impression on Eisav, that he should recognize the greatness of the gift he was receiving. As Rashi writes, עדר לפני חברו מלא עין כדי להשביע עינו של אותו רשע, ולתוהו על רבוי הדורון, "One herd before the next… in order to satisfy the eye of this *rasha* and bewilder him with the enormity of the gift." We see that Yaakov made rational and appropriate hishtadlus. He was afraid of a battle with Eisav, and therefore, he sent this large gift to Eisav, to appease him.

But there is a great rule that one must remember when it comes to hishtadlus. There is no direct connection between *hishtadlus* and salvation. One shouldn't think that his hishtadlus was needed, and without it the salvation wouldn't occur. Hashem can give His salvation and successes in other ways.

This is alluded to the second time it states רֶוַח in Tanach. For it states in Megilas Esther

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9. We quote the words of Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz:

"We must explain that Yaakov Avinu's deed was not a supernatural act at all. Rather, when a person has a powerful desire to help others, that desire grants him strength that he did not previously possess. This is because a person's physical strength is dependent upon his spiritual strength. When that spiritual strength is awakened within him, he is capable of acting far beyond his natural limitations. Therefore, because of his יחד לב, because he united all of his strength to perform chesed for others, we ask Hashem, אל תמנע מים, that He should not withhold water from us."

(Esther 4:14) כִּי אִם הַחֲרֵשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בָּעֵת הַזֹּאת רֶוַח וְהַצָּלָה יַעֲמוֹד לַיְהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and rescue will arise for the Yidden from elsewhere…" The pasuk is saying that the salvation will occur, and if not through Esther, it will come via some other venue.

This explains why Yaakov requested that there be וְרֶוַח תָּשִׂימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר, "a space between one herd and another herd." While he was making hishtadlus, he mentions רֶוַח, alluding to the pasuk רֶוַח וְהַצָּלָה יַעֲמוֹד לַיְהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר, that Hashem can save in other ways. One shouldn't assume that his hishtadlus was needed for the salvation to occur.

A hint to this is the Gemara (Chulin 7a) נתן עיניו בצד זה ואכל בצד אחר, "He puts his eyes on one side, and he eats from the other side." Alluded in these words is that one puts his eyes and *hishtadlus* in one place, and his parnassah comes from somewhere else. Parnassah is from Hashem, and not from hishtadlus.

Bitachon

The Shevet Mussar writes that the word בטחון comes from בטח, which means to be certain. The ideal level of one's *bitachon* is to feel certain that Hashem will save him.[10]

It states (Tehillim 22:5) בְּךָ בָּטְחוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ בָּטְחוּ וַתְּפַלְּטֵמוֹ, "Our ancestors trusted in You; they trusted and You rescued them." The word בָּטְחוּ, "trusted" is written twice in this pasuk. Why? It could have stated, בְּךָ בָּטְחוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ וַתְּפַלְּטֵמוֹ, "Our ancestors trusted in You and You rescued them." Why does the *pasuk* write בָּטְחוּ again?

Shevet Mussar replies that the second בָּטְחוּ וַתְּפַלְּטֵמוֹ doesn't imply that Hashem saved them. It describes the level of bitachon of our ancestors. The pasuk begins, בְּךָ בָּטְחוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ, "Our ancestors trusted in You." There are many levels of bitachon. What type of bitachon did they have? The pasuk replies, בָּטְחוּ וַתְּפַלְּטֵמוֹ; their bitachon was so strong, they felt like they were already saved.[11]

The topic of bitachon is discussed in this week's parashah when it says (34:25) וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל הָעִיר בֶּטַח, "They came upon the city with confidence, with bitachon." This refers to Shimon and Levi, who came to wage war against Shechem. Shevet Mussar explains that they came with bitachon, without any fear. As it states וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל הָעִיר בֶּטַח. Therefore, Hashem performed miracles for them, and they were able to kill all the people who fought with them.

In this week's parashah, we find that Yaakov was afraid and worried, as it states (32:8) וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ, "Yaakov became very

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10. The Shevet Sofer (quoted in *Shaarei Simchah*) teaches that a person should trust in Hashem with all his heart, until he feels certain that help will come. When one attains this level of bitachon, he remains calm and free from worry, feeling in his heart as though his salvation has already arrived.

An important point to remember is that bitachon is not reserved only for those facing extraordinary challenges. It is meant for every person, in every circumstance. Whether dealing with major life decisions or seemingly minor day-to-day concerns, one should place his trust in Hashem and live with the confidence that Hashem will certainly provide the help he needs.

11. Reb Mordechai Benet zt"l (*Drashos* 2) likewise teaches that bitachon means feeling certain that Hashem will help us. He derives this from the pasuk (Tehillim 13:6), "Va'ani b'chasdecha batachti..." ("But as for me, I trust in Your kindness..."), followed by, "Ashirah laHashem ki gamal alai" ("I will sing to Hashem, for He has dealt kindly with me").

The phrase "ki gamal alai" is written in the past tense. In Dovid HaMelech's eyes, the salvation had already arrived. Such was the depth of his trust in Hashem. Even before experiencing the deliverance, he felt complete confidence that Hashem's kindness would surely come, and he therefore sang as though it had already been bestowed upon him.

afraid and distressed." Daas Zekainim m'Baalei HaTosfos says we should translate the *pasuk* as follows:

ויירא יעקב מאד, Yaakov was very afraid, ויצר לו, and he was upset with himself for being afraid. Hashem promised that He would protect Yaakov, as it states (28:15): והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתיך בכל אשר תלך, "Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go," and now Yaakov was afraid of Eisav. Yaakov asked himself, "Why am I afraid? What happened to my strong emunah and bitachon that I used to have?"

Rashi (32:11) writes, לכך אני ירא, שמא משהבטחתני נתלכלכתי בחטא, ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו, "The reason I am afraid is that from the time You promised me [to guard me] perhaps I have become soiled with aveiros, and this will cause me to be given over into Eisav's hands."

The Leshem (Vayeitzei, on pasuk 28:20) elaborates that Yaakov Avinu had a special reason to be afraid, this time. It was an exception to the rule (as he explains there). But generally, one should trust Hashem with certainty that He will help him.

The Leshem writes, "Although it is known that יראת חטא, fear of sin, is a very wonderful level, as it states (Mishlei 28:14): אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם מְפַחֵד תָּמִיד, 'Fortunate is the man who is always afraid' – it means to be fearful not to commit any more aveiros. It doesn't mean that one is afraid that maybe he won't receive good because of his aveiros. Rather, the way of tzaddikim is (Tehillim 112:7) מִשְּׁמוּעָה רָעָה לֹא יִירָא נָכוֹן לִבּוֹ בָּטֵחַ בה', 'He will not fear bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in Hashem.' He trusts in Hashem, and he has no fears at all."[12]

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12. Several times in *Shemonah Esrei*, we say the word *ki* (כי), meaning "because," and it is used to express the reason Hashem should answer our tefillos.

For example, we say, *"U'ge'alenu ge'ulah sheleimah ki Kel Go'el chazak Atah"* - "Redeem us with a complete redemption, because You, Hashem, are a mighty Redeemer." The word *ki* explains the reason Hashem should help us. It is because Hashem is a mighty Redeemer.

Similarly, in the brachah of *Refa'einu*, we say, *"Refa'einu Hashem v'neirafei..."* - "Heal us, Hashem, and we will be healed..." The reason Hashem should heal us is *"ki Kel Melech rofei ne'eman v'rachaman Atah"* - "because You are a faithful and merciful King and Healer." Once again, *ki* expresses the reason Hashem should help us.

This helps us understand an important lesson about *bitachon*. In the brachah of *Al HaTzaddikim,* we say, *"U'le'olam lo neivosh ki b'cha batachnu"* - "May we never be ashamed because we trusted in You." In this brachah, we ask Hashem to help us and spare us from shame, *ki b'cha batachnu*, because we trusted in Him. The *bitachon* itself is a reason for Hashem to grant us salvation. In other words, we trust and rely on Hashem's kindness, and the merit of that *bitachon* itself helps us, and Hashem will certainly bestow His kindness upon us.

Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt"l writes in *Orchos Yosher* (*Pachad U'De'agah*):

"Some people are always afraid. They are afraid of all kinds of disasters, such as disease, war, evil people, and the like. Throughout their lives, they are constantly worried: 'Maybe this will happen,' or 'Maybe that will occur.' Some are afraid to travel because of their fears. Some are afraid to leave their homes, rachmana litzlan. This is not good.

Chazal (Brachos 60a) say: 'There was a student who was walking behind Reb Yishmael b'Reb Yosi in the marketplace of Tzion. Reb Yishmael saw that the student was afraid and said to him, "You are a sinner," as it states (Yeshayah 33:14), "The sinners in Tzion were afraid."'

The student asked, 'But doesn't it state (Mishlei 28:14), "Fortunate is the man who is always afraid"?'

Reb Yishmael replied, *hachu b'divrei Torah ksiv* - that pasuk refers to Torah study. Rashi explains that the pasuk praises one who is always concerned that he might forget his Torah learning. Because of that concern,

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he constantly reviews his studies. This fear is valid and beneficial.

But we should cleanse our hearts of all other fears. Furthermore, fear undermines a person's health and can cause illness, as Chazal state (Sanhedrin 100b), 'Do not bring worries into your heart, because worry has killed many mighty people.'

In general, fear is a sign of a lack of emunah. If a person would believe with complete faith that everything comes from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and that one cannot even stub his finger unless it was decreed in Heaven, why would he be afraid? If the decree was made, chas v'shalom, there is nothing he can do to avoid it. All clever plans and strategies cannot prevent Hashem's will from being fulfilled. And if it was not decreed in Heaven, there is certainly nothing to fear.

We are always in Hashem's hands, both in times of war and in times of peace, and Hashem has many ways to accomplish His will. A person should fear nothing but Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and should be concerned only about committing an aveirah, chas v'shalom, or failing to perform a mitzvah properly.

Although Chazal (Bava Kama 60b) instruct us to make *hishtadlus* and exercise caution, as they state, 'If there is a plague in the city, remain at home. If there is a famine in the city, go elsewhere.' this is because we are obligated to make *hishtadlus*. But there is no reason to be afraid and worried.

Chazal (Taanis 22a) praise those who are always happy and who bring happiness to others. Chazal say that they are *bnei Olam Haba*, members of Olam Haba."